

Building Individual Reciprocity into Campus-Community Partnerships

Eric Malm

Abstract

Extending educational experiences beyond the traditional boundaries of the classroom is an exciting yet challenging prospect. As the classroom context changes the power structure of the class is also likely to change, shifting from the instructor to students and community members. This article describes how a campus-community partnership has evolved in ways which place increased emphasis on student engagement and individual student participation. Building on a notion of *individual reciprocity*, a service-learning course partnered with a local arts festival has been gradually restructured to provide the opportunity and expectation for each student to bring personal skills and interests to the community, participating in much the same way as volunteer members of the community. Several strategies were employed for identifying and utilizing individual student interests, including the creation of a Community Contribution Statement. Student engagement was measured using both the Community Service Self-Efficacy Scale and tangible measures of student participation to assess whether a course designed around the notion of individual reciprocity provided improved student outcomes. Results from this study showed significantly higher self-efficacy scores than benchmark service-learning courses and yielded improved student performance.

In many campus-community partnerships the relationship between the university and the community partner is well-defined, and roles within organizations are well-understood. Yet in many other cases work takes place between universities and grass-roots organizations that may lack paid staff or clearly-defined organizational structures. This article tells the story of an emerging relationship between a small college and a newly-formed, all-volunteer Arts Council. For the past three years (2010-2012) second-year students from Cabrini College have worked to plan, promote and staff the now-annual Norristown Arts Festival in Norristown, PA. The festival is the cornerstone activity of an arts district, and is run by the Norristown Arts Council. It is important to note that the Arts Council itself was formed just weeks before the first class became involved in planning the first festival in 2010. So in this case the class has played an important role in the development and growth of the community organization.

The story that follows describes how the members of the partnership- students, community members and the instructor- have worked together to create a structure that recognizes both the individual and institutional motivations of each participant. The members of this partnership have worked to extend traditional notions of reciprocity to include not just organizations or stakeholder groups, but ideally every individual involved in the project. In the most recent year of the partnership several strategies were employed for identifying and utilizing individual student interests, including the creation of a Community Contribution Statement and the active in-class participation of community volunteers. Strategies were employed both to acknowledge the personal contributions of the community volunteers who were working with the class, and to encourage students to make their own personal contributions to the community project. Student work assignments were generated around stated student interests, after students heard the personal stories of several individual community volunteers. In addition to measuring concrete student contributions to the festival, levels of student engagement were measured using the Community Service Self-Efficacy Scale at the end of the semester. The purpose of this research is to determine

whether a course designed around the notion of individual reciprocity provided improved student outcomes. The results of the student engagement strategy have been promising. Measures of both concrete festival contributions (performers recruited, ads sold, etc.) and measures of student self-efficacy suggest that building partnership work around individual student interests may lead to improved student performance and possibly stronger, more sustainable, partnerships.

Literature

This service-learning course and partnership can be placed within the contexts of two related bodies of literature- a literature on community networking, and a subset of the literature on community partnerships. As an all-volunteer non-profit whose membership is comprised of unaffiliated community volunteers and volunteers who have some professional connection to local arts, culture, education and governmental organizations, the Arts Council has many attributes of an organic network. A key aspect of organic networks is that they exist because of their usefulness or value; if a network ceases to be useful it dissolves. The work of the partnership is also informed by the subset of community partnerships literature focusing on the concept of reciprocity. But unlike partnerships between universities and well-established organizations, the concept of reciprocity takes on a more complicated complexion when the partnership is essentially with a meta-network, rather than a single organization.

Community Networking

Alison Gilchrist's (2009) [The well-connected community: A networking approach to community development](#) explores the important role that networking plays in community development work. Her core idea is that a "well-connected community" is one in which many networks (meta-networks) are connected. She describes networks as being either 'organic' or 'engineered,' terms which are related to both the origin and structure of networks. Organic networks arise from the ether, so to speak, with no hierarchical structure. Engineered networks, in contrast, are set up by a particular agency for a particular purpose. Gilchrist states that organic "networks have no centralizing or organizing mechanism. Function and authority is distributed across the nodes and linkages, such that decision-making and implementation are conducted through informal and temporary coalitions of actors and resources (p. 53)." As such, organic networks are not beholden to an organization, although people within organizations can also be part of networks. She also states "Networks generally operate on the basis of shared values and informal connections that are maintained by a general reciprocal commitment. They differ from formal organizations in being less dependent on structure and tend to action through personal interactions between people who know (or know of) each other. (p. 61)"

The establishment of trust and mutual respect are critical elements of network building. The process of expanding relationships from people being "contacts" to real people with feelings and shared interests takes time and effort. In the business world this process of learning to identify personal interests and quickly establish trust and a sense of connection has been engrained and codified into popular sales systems (Sandler, 1996). In Sandler's view, if salespeople cannot build trust and rapport with a potential client, they are unlikely to make a sale. Interestingly, self-awareness and

mutual respect are fundamental to this sales system. Self-awareness and mutual respect are also fundamental to networking for community development.

Economist Kenneth Boulding (1989) addresses the positive power of networks in his book The three faces of power. Boulding views relationships through the lens of power, identifying three main types of power- political, economic, and integrative. His “major thesis ... is that it is integrative power that is the most dominant and significant form of power, in the sense that neither threat power nor economic power can achieve very much in the absence of legitimacy, which is one of the more important aspects of integrative power.” (p. 10) He defines integrative power as “, the power to create such relationships as love, respect, friendship, legitimacy, and so on.”

Within the context of community work the idea of integrative power is an important one. While people may be pressured to work together for economic or political reasons, high quality work is most likely to result when people *want* to work together. This is especially true with campus-community work. In many cases community-engaged courses involve more work for faculty, and more (or at least different and potentially ‘uncomfortable’) work for students; thus for this work to go beyond meeting a requirement participants must have some additional motivation for putting in effort. In creating a space that allows for multiple views and motivations, a sense of *legitimacy* is created that forms the basis for sustained effort and integrative power. Without legitimacy integrative power vanishes.

In his book Community building: building communities without building walls (2001), Gerald Frug reminds us that successful community building needs to acknowledge the multiplicity of groups and identities that each individual embraces. Creating successful communities requires building bridges, acknowledging the perspectives of others, and sharing one’s own perspective. Frug’s view is ultimately an individualistic one; since groups do not exist in the absence of individuals community building requires respecting each individual in the community.

Reciprocal Partnerships

Ideas of reciprocity have been a central component of the literature on campus-community partnerships. Boyer’s (1990, 1996) challenge to the academy to become more fully engaged in the community requires the academy to adopt aspects of reciprocity in its relationships with community organizations. Lorilee Sandman (2008) documents the evolution of the movement, identifying the importance of establishing “bi-directional reciprocity”, the idea that all participants in a partnership need a place at the table. Authors including Pew (2004), Stoecker (2005, 2008), and Saltmarsh, Hartley and Clayton (2009) describe the importance of including community partners in all phases of a project. Clearly the idea of reciprocity has been an important one at the institutional level.

Several models take the idea of institutional reciprocity farther by describing the interrelationships between the participants in partnership work. McLean and Behringer’s (2008) Give-Get model, for example, focuses on the active participation of all parties. The authors state “a true partnership is one in which each party contributes (or gives) to the partnership and receives (or gets) benefits from it.” (p 66) The Give-Get model can be applied to individuals, organizations, or both. The SOFAR model of Bringle, Clayton and Price (2009) provides a framework in which five stakeholder

groups (Students, Organizations, Faculty, Administrators, and Residents) are explicitly considered. They use the terms *equity* and *integrity* to describe partnerships, and position relationships along a continuum according to the level of these characteristics.

Clayton et al. (2010) extend the SOFAR model by empirically evaluating the relationships among participants. The models described above expand the notion of reciprocity beyond the institutional level, and begin to more consciously acknowledge various stakeholder groups.

Individual Reciprocity

The notion of *individual reciprocity* may be the logical, although perhaps idealistic, result of fusing concepts of community networking and reciprocal partnerships. Community networking teaches us that building individual relationships is critical to building a successful community. Understanding the wants, needs, and perspectives of community members allows a community development worker to connect and motivate other members of the community. The community partnership literature teaches us that for organizations to work together optimally the wants, needs and perspectives of each organization need to be considered. Taken together, these literatures have important implications for organic, grass-roots networks. When networks are organic particular attention needs to be placed on the needs and perspectives of each individual organization or person, since organic networks dissolve unless they are 'useful' in some way to the participants.

Boulding's concept of integrative power and Gilchrist's idea of the well-connected community are consistent with the idea of individual reciprocity and are important building blocks for a sustainable partnership. A sustainable community partnership is one in which ALL actors, both volunteers and the individuals within partnered organizations, have the opportunity to work for personal as well as organizational reasons. When organizational motives dominate, and do not leave room for people to work out of personal interests, the potential for partnership work is limited. Individuals within the organization do what they must, not what they are capable of doing. Lacking true reciprocity, individual volunteers find that their voices are not being heard or respected and they wither away. Thus the challenge for universities and community organizations is to create environments of true reciprocity that allow people to serve to their full potential. This article describes how notions of individual reciprocity were used to transform a service-learning course.

Project Overview

Organizing a Community Arts Festival

From 2010-2012 second-year students have worked to help plan, promote and staff the Norristown Arts Hill Festival. The festival is the centerpiece of an arts district that was recently established to help promote economic and community development in Norristown. Students from Cabrini College participate in the work as part of an interdisciplinary 'engagements' course that fuses the college's social justice and writing requirements into a variety of community-based courses. The festival is run by an all-volunteer Arts Council, of which the instructor is a board member.

The Arts Council has relied heavily on student participation in each of its first three years of existence. The relationship between the class and the Arts Council can, at times, be a tense one. While the Arts Council is eager to have student help, the long-term success (or failure) of the festival and the arts district depends in part on the performance of each student in the class. Thus the sustainability of the arts festival and the campus-community partnership go hand-in-hand.

An Evolving Model of Student Engagement

After the first year of the festival it became clear that student participation and engagement can vary significantly, depending on student interest. During the first year students signed up to work with the newly-established festival committees (marketing, logistics, fundraising, and real estate). The work was unlike traditional classroom work, in that it required students to directly contact members of the local community, and 'figure out' work assignments that had never been done before. A handful of students were actively engaged, while many others were not.

In the second year more attention was placed on identifying individual motivation early in the semester. Several community members came to class and told their personal stories, describing why they spend their time on the festival and why they believe an Arts District can help transform the Norristown community. Students read Gilchrist's book The well-connected community, and wrote reflective essays on their participation in groups and communities. Students then picked committee assignments and were given the option of suggesting specific projects (such as creating a promotional video). In this second year a larger proportion of students seemed to engage with projects, but a significant number of students were underutilized. A challenge during the second year was balancing motivation and supervision- a number of students appeared willing to help, but in hindsight may not have had the tools they needed to do their assigned work.

During the third year the instructor and community partners went even further to leverage individual motivations. Building upon a model of self-directed learning (Hironaka, 2011) students were asked to construct individual Community Contribution Statements. These statements asked students to describe how they would contribute to the arts festival, identify their individual learning goals (e.g. what type of skills or experiences would the work include), and describe how they would assess their contribution. Students completed these statements after several sessions with individual community members learning about the festival objectives and hearing the personal stories of the volunteer community partners. Since several majors were represented in the class, including education, business, communications and exercise science, student skills and interests were varied.

While the Community Contribution Statement placed added pressure on students to identify specific ways they would contribute and be assessed, the statements also placed additional pressure on the instructor. A philosophical change took place, where instead of trying to fill committee slots with students the instructor attempted to find or create projects that met students' stated goals. By asking the students to identify what they wanted to do, the instructor felt obligated to honor their desires. In many cases students chose work projects that were closely related to the festival (such as doing graphic design, writing press releases, or recruiting performers), but in other cases the

stated contribution areas were more distant. For example, a small group of volleyball players wanted to create a volleyball activity in the newly-formed ‘kid’s corner’ of the festival. While logistical concerns did not allow for the erection of a volleyball court at the festival, students were able to host activities promoting the festival at the Police Athletic League and created a children’s health coloring table at the festival.

The approach taken in this most recent year was built on the idea of individual reciprocity. By getting to know community volunteers as individuals, students learned both about the mission and vision of the community organization (i.e. the Norristown Arts Council) as well as the individual interests and motivations of volunteers. By inviting community members into the classroom, the class recognized and honored the skills and abilities of these community volunteers. The purpose of the research presented here was to determine whether a course built on notions of individual reciprocity would improve the level of student engagement and performance in a service-learning course.

Research Methods

The findings presented in this article came from a survey administered to students in two sections of a sophomore level service-learning class during the Spring 2012 semester, along with tangible measures of student contributions over the first three years of the festival. One course section (labeled ‘Arts Festival’) was taught by the author and utilized the student-centered approach described above. The other section (labeled ‘Service Learning Comparison Class’) was taught by another faculty member who assigned students service-learning work tasks, rather than soliciting input from students. The courses were chosen to represent both the traditional approach of assigning students work without their input, and an alternative approach of building work assignments around student interests.

Student demographics are shown below. The survey was submitted to the college’s Institutional Review Board for approval. According to college policy, general educational research on instructional strategies, instructional techniques or classroom management systems is exempt from IRB approval. The IRB reviewed the survey used in this research and confirmed its exempt status.

Table 1: Student demographics

	Service Learning Comparison Class	Arts Festival
Male/Female	60%/40%	40%/60%
Average age	19	19
Full-time status	All	All

Tangible festival contributions were measured both in the aggregate (total performers, vendors, sponsors), as well as by measuring the number of specific contributions made by students. For example, in addition to tracking the number of performers who appeared at the festival, we also tracked the number of performers who were recruited directly by students. These tangible contributions represent the impact that students had on the festival and were tracked using the Arts Council’s tracking reports for all three years of the festival.

Findings

The new course approach, which incorporated notions of individual reciprocity into the class, yielded improved student outcomes. When compared to previous years, tangible contributions increased noticeably. Student self-efficacy also improved, compared to a similar service-learning course offered during the same semester.

Tangible Outcomes

Tangible student contributions to the festival increased as a result of the new approach. Primary outcomes for each year are measured each year and are shown in Table 2. Particular attention should be paid to the number of student-initiated performers, advertisers, and news stories. In the most recent year five acts were recruited, three advertisers were solicited, and two news stories were published directly by students in the eighteen member class. These tangible results flowed from the Community Contribution Statements. Two students had many contacts in the local music world and successfully recruited several performers. Business students wanted sales experience and were excited about trying to sell ads for the program book. Communication students working on the newspaper were excited about writing press releases and stories for the school newspaper; while students had been assigned PR tasks in the past, students did not succeed in getting articles published prior to the festival in previous years. The dramatic rise in social media reach is due in part by a slightly increased budget, but also as a result of a social media promotion effort conducted by members of the class who were interested in twitter and Facebook.

Table 2: Festival Outcomes By Year (Total/Student-Initiated)

Outcome	2012	2011	2010
Number of Performers	28/5	19/3	28/2
Number of Donors	32/0	39/0	32/0
Number of Advertisers	44/2	40/1	48/1
Number of News Stories Prior to Festival	3/2	0	1
Social Media Ad Reach	1.2 million	240K	n/a

Source: Norristown Arts Council Festival Report, 2012

Student Self-Efficacy

Consistent with these increased concrete contributions, students in this year's course also showed higher levels of self-efficacy than students in the comparable service-learning class. A primary goal of the course sequence was to provide students with the opportunity to contribute their knowledge and skills to the community, and for students to gain confidence in their abilities to contribute meaningfully. The Community Service Self-Efficacy Survey (Reeb, et al., 1998) was chosen for assessment because the questions it contains include many of the themes (of social justice and making a difference through service) that are stressed in the course sequence. The survey contains ten statements about student attitudes toward service and uses a ten point scale where 1 represents "not at all" and 10 represents "a great deal". The results from the two course sections, along with comparison results from the Reeb instrument are presented in Table 3. There were 15 students surveyed in each of the sections.

Table 3: Community Service Self-Efficacy Survey Results Comparison

Community Service Self-Efficacy Scale	REEB, et al.----- Results from their paper.		2012 Survey Results	
	Service Learning (n=9)	Non-Service Learning (n=37)	Service Learning Comparison Class (n=15)	Arts Festival (n=15)
1 If I choose to participate in community service in the future, I will be able to make a meaningful contribution.	7.3 (3.1)	5.9 (2.7)	7.3 (1.6)	8.8 (1.4)
2 In the future, I will be able to find community service opportunities which are relevant to my interests and abilities.	8.3 (3.1)	6.4 (2.8)	7.9 (1.8)	8.8 (1.5)
3 I am confident that, through community service, I can help in promoting social justice.	7 (3.1)	5.6 (3.0)	6.4 (1.6)	8.9 (1.4)
4 I am confident that, through community service, I can make a difference in my community.	8 (3.1)	6.3 (2.8)	7.2 (1.6)	8.7 (2.2)
5 I am confident that I can help individuals in need by participating in community service activities.	8 (3.0)	6.4 (2.8)	6.9 (2.1)	8.7 (1.7)
6 I am confident that, in future community service activities, I will be able to interact with relevant professionals in ways that are meaningful and effective.	7.5 (3.1)	6.5 (2.6)	7.0 (1.9)	9.1 (1.4)
7 I am confident that, through community service, I can help in promoting equal opportunity for citizens.	7.1 (2.9)	5.8 (2.9)	7.1 (1.7)	8.6 (1.8)
8 Through community service, I can apply knowledge in ways that solve "real-life" problems.	7.8 (3.0)	6.6 (2.7)	7.1 (2.0)	8.9 (1.6)
9 By participating in community service, I can help people to help themselves.	7.8 (2.9)	6.5 (2.6)	7.3 (2.1)	8.8 (1.5)
10 I am confident that I will participate in community service activities in the future.	8.2 (3.2)	5.7 (3.1)	7.7 (2.4)	8.3 (2.1)

Note: Values in parentheses are standard deviation. CSSES item scores ranged from 1 ("not at all") to 10 ("a great deal").

Average student scores from the Arts Festival section were higher for each question than the published results for Reeb et al.'s original service-learning section and non-service-learning groups. A paired t-test showed that the average survey scores for the Arts Festival class were higher than Reeb's service-learning scores as a group, at a 99% confidence level. Scores from the other service-learning a comparison were not statistically significant different from the average scores of Reeb's service-learning section. Thus the Arts Festival scores were higher than both Reeb's service-learning benchmark, and the scores from the comparison section from the Spring 2012 semester. These results suggest that the change in paradigm, from assigning student

tasks to soliciting and encouraging student contributions, has impacted both self-efficacy and tangible contributions to the festival.

Discussion

As an all-volunteer organization the Arts Council relies primarily on the personal passions and interests of its volunteer members. While some members work for local arts, culture, education, and government organizations, the reality is that volunteers are not compensated for the time spent on festival activities. Consciously or not, this means that to be successful the Arts Council has needed to operate in ways that leverage individual energy. If individuals do not feel motivated to do a task they will not do it, or will not do it well.

Through an informal collaborative process, members of the Arts Council have worked together to figure out how to motivate students. Two council members, both former teachers, have enthusiastically come into the classroom to share their stories and experiences with students. These individuals seem to relish the interaction with students. Other community members have willingly come into class to share their professional expertise in marketing, public relations, and social media. These in-class experiences provided some form of personal enjoyment to the guest-teacher, helped the students feel a part of the arts community, and increased the probability that student work would be successful.

A student coach has played an important role the past two years. In an attempt to shift the power dynamic, the instructor has tried to play a role more akin to facilitator than project manager. The student coach has been able to play a leadership role that provides students with direct guidance while allowing them the latitude to find their own way to complete work. The student coach also acted as an intermediary between community members and the class. The instructor was no longer a gate-keeper between students and the community.

The Arts Council has also taken professional responsibilities into account when creating work assignments. For example, members of community non-profits were not asked to participate in fundraising since the Arts Council may in essence compete for donations with member non-profits. Similarly the Arts Council has worked creatively to leverage the professional skills of a social media and marketing expert, while limiting the number of pro bono hours they contribute. These professionals act as consultants to students, passing along knowledge while limiting competition with paying clients for billable hours.

The arts festival project has provided an interesting and dynamic opportunity to explore the challenges and benefits of engaging participants on an individual level. Unlike the corporate world, where 'top down' edicts can be effective due to the financial motivations involved, many campus-community partnerships exist in a different context. While students may work for grades and faculty may work in part because of institutional support for community-based programs, the dynamics in community based courses are often different from those of a traditional classroom. The following list of key concepts has emerged over the past three years of partnership work.

Reciprocity

While the term reciprocity is often used in the partnership literature, it is not always applied to everyone involved in the work. It's not just being open to comments from a spokesperson from the community organization, but actually hearing and respecting every person involved in the project. For example, acknowledging student interests and inviting them to bring their personal talents and skills into the partnership work makes them more authentic members of the community, and provides a stronger motivation to participate. While encouraging reciprocal relationships with all participants isn't an easy task, it's something to strive for and something that creates what Boulding terms legitimacy.

Control

For both teachers and academic administrators control is a sacred concept. Most teachers feel the need to control what goes on in the classroom, and academic leaders feel the need to control what goes on in the name of their institution. By ceding control of the classroom to community members, faculty can bring new perspectives to the classroom and acknowledge community members as equal partners in education. In giving students the responsibility to engage with community members outside of class, faculty cannot directly observe what students do. But this loss of control can be balanced with positive experiences in which students own and control their education.

Individual Motivation

People work hardest when they're doing something they like. The adage "follow your bliss" need not be checked at the classroom door. Positioning community work so that students can choose topics in which they have a personal interest, allowing them to contribute to projects in ways that they find personally rewarding results in higher quality. The same is true for community volunteers. The social media expert was excited to be invited into the classroom, and enjoyed sharing her knowledge with students. Providing people opportunities to contribute in personally meaningful ways is critical for creating a sustained community effort.

Trust

Trust takes time to develop, yet is critical if people are to work closely together. Community members must trust members of the Arts Council, and Arts Council members must earn this trust from community members. Students and some community volunteers may only be involved in a project for a semester (for students) or a few days (for a volunteer), but establishing some level of trust with these shorter-term partnership members is still important. Employing conscious strategies to share individual interests and stories appears to build confidence and trust.

Nontraditional Roles

Partnership work often requires people to assume non-traditional roles. Students may learn about social media from a community member, and then in turn educate their teacher. Whether it's the community member as teacher, a student who is directing a class project, or institutions that are listening and learning from the public, successful

partnerships need to be flexible enough to allow for non-traditional ways of learning and participating in community.

Conclusions

Notions of reciprocity are central to the literature on campus-community partnerships. The relationship between the university and a well-defined community organization has been a central part of the discussion of engagement scholarship. Clearly the voices of multiple stakeholders make research, service and advocacy projects more meaningful and relevant. Yet based on the dominant institutional voice in much of the literature it appears that universities are yet to relinquish significant control of campus-community partnerships to students, faculty members, and community volunteers. This article describes how the idea of individual reciprocity has been used to better-engage students in an interdisciplinary course on community development.

These notions of individual reciprocity formed the basis for a partnership between a classroom and a local arts organization. Over a period of three years members of the partnership developed collaborative ways of working with one another that honored individual interests and respected professional obligations. This year students created Community Contribution Statements describing how each student proposed to work to participate in the planning and execution of a third annual arts festival. The creation of these statements, along with the important role played by a classroom coach and individual community volunteers, helped shift the power dynamic in class. Focusing work assignments around student interests instead of a predetermined list of tasks provided students the opportunity to more fully engage in the service experience. Evidence from the Community Service Self-Efficacy Survey and data on concrete student contributions support the assertion that this framework, based on notions of individual reciprocity, helped create a partnership experience that was successful for all involved.

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Author

Eric Malm is an Associate Professor of Economics and Business Administration at Cabrini College in Radnor, PA. Correspondence about this article should be directed to Eric Malm: email: eric.malm@cabrini.edu